

## Public reaction to jaguar's saga a positive sign

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### *The Arizona Republic*

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He was a tease in a fancy spotted coat. A male of mystery who appeared from time to time with a poignant message for a rapidly urbanizing state: "I'm here."

The jaguar, dubbed Macho B by wildlife officials who photographed him over 13 years, reminded Arizona of the richness and wonder of its natural world.

He died in captivity a week ago today, which was an inglorious and unfair ending.

For the biologists who got to know him from pictures taken when he tripped the shutter of hidden cameras, it was certainly a painful task to euthanize this beautiful animal.

Some environmentalists are critical of how the Arizona Game and Fish biologists handled the situation. The Center for Biological Diversity is calling for an investigation. We understand the frustration. But Game and Fish biologists deserve to be seen as allies, not adversaries, in wildlife conservation.

Yet the passions surrounding this animal's death are the good news in this story. These feelings show how far Arizona and the nation have advanced from the days when

predators were systematically killed. This cat didn't die because of efforts to eradicate his breed. He died after heroic efforts to save him.

This jaguar was a national treasure. It is believed he was the last of a handful of jaguars known to be in the United States in recent years. These animals are endangered and primarily exist south of the border. Macho B was first photographed by a trail camera in 1996. He tantalized and delighted wildlife biologists by tripping camera wires now and then.

Wildlife biologists had no intention of capturing Arizona's Macho B. He was caught by accident on Feb. 18 during an effort to study mountain lions and black bears. It was a rare opportunity to tag and then track a jaguar.

But 12 days after that capture, those monitoring Macho B recognized a problem with his behavior. He wasn't moving normally. They captured him, this time on purpose, to see what was wrong. The 15- or 16-year old cat was euthanized after it was found he had severe kidney failure.

Dr. Dean Rice, the veterinarian who treated the cat at the Phoenix Zoo, said Macho B likely suffered kidney disease before his first capture. Being sedated could have

aggravated the problem. But he was an old cat.

Nobody knows whether he was the last of his kind in Arizona. We hope he wasn't.

More important than hope, Arizonans can insist on maintaining open spaces and connectivity of habitats between Mexico and the United States so that our wild lands can support wild and mysterious creatures whose magnificence inspires deep human emotion and admiration.